



Two Foot Level performs at Goodwood Jams. The band will perform at the Sundown Series Aug. 28 at Cascades Park. PROVIDED

Amanda Sieradzki Council on Culture & Arts

After a one-year hiatus, Downtown Tallahassee has brought back the summer Sundown Concert Series. Musician Jason McMillan of Two Foot Level can't wait to hop on his mandolin and bring live music back to Cascades Park for this free event.

"Live music transports you into another way of being," says McMillan. "I've noticed now more than ever people are appreciative at shows and you can see it's fulfilling for them. It's such an important part of a lot of people's lives. There's something freeing about seeing live music being performed."

McMillan was born and raised in Tallahassee, and at this point, says he feels like part of the fabric of the community. He began his journey in the arts at Leon High School in a beginning guitar class.

From there, McMillan continued putting together bands with friends and exploring visual art. When his wife encouraged him to pursue teaching, he decided to complete a degree in art education from Florida State University.

Playing music, teaching art

McMillan has taught art at W.T. Moore Elementary for 18 years. His proudest moments are wit-

nessing students make meaningful, expressive pieces, and McMillan believes art should always be fun. He curates his classroom to be a safe space for students to make mistakes and express their ideas.

"I've always thought art should be for the individual," says McMillan. "Even though sometimes we have projects that strive towards a common goal, I expect everyone's art to be slightly different because of the individuality that exists. My art room has always been a space where kids could feel comfortable and didn't have to be any certain way. They have freedom within parameters."

Music has been a constant throughout his teaching career. Sometimes he brings his guitar to his classroom and plays a countdown song for his students to sing along with. His students have also greeted him at Food Truck Thursdays after his sets with Two Foot Level.

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The Sundown Concert Series will feature the Frank Jones Band and the Common Taters on July 24. Two Foot Level, shown here, and Slow Low Crow will finish out the series on Aug. 28. PROVIDED

If you go

What: Sundown Concert Series

When: Frank Jones Band on July 24 and Two Foot Level on Aug. 28

Where: Cascades Park, 1001 S. Gadsden St.

Cost: Free

Contact: For more information on the concert series, visit visittallahassee.com. For more on Two Foot Level, visit twofootlevel.net/.

McMillan

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McMillan started the band in 2008 with childhood friend and guitarist Ruben Fields. Fields had written several original songs, and together they asked drummer Dillon Bradley-Brown, bassist Todd Bevis and banjo-player Ross Beck to round out the quintet.

Building tool is band's namesake

Two Foot Level's sound encompasses everything from Americana, bluegrass and folk to indie, reggae and rock music. They've released four studio albums over the years, most recently "Until We Meet Again" in 2020.

Most songs are constructed as a band with Fields often taking the lead on bringing ideas to the table. McMillan describes the process as democratic because members chime in when they have a suggestion and are open to seeing where a song can go.



Musician Jason McMillan of Two Foot Level. PROVIDED

"We have elements of a jam band without exclusively being that," says McMillan. "A lot of the songs that we do

will have a lot of structure, but we also have moments within the song to improvise where it's your turn to do what you want to do."

Using his visual arts skills, McMillan has designed T-shirts, logos, stickers and flyers for Two Foot Level. The band's namesake comes from the building tool and is often incorporated into the band's promotional graphics.

One of his favorite designs showed a swooping owl holding a level in its talons. Another depicted a level with instruments balanced on top. While many of the band members have experience in construction and home improvement, there's also a metaphorical connotation to the name.

"It also transcends being a construction tool with the idea of having two feet level in life and finding balance in that way too," says McMillan.

Performing again

The group has performed locally and regionally at the Spirit of Suwanee Music Park, Gainesville's Heartwood

Sound Stage among other festivals. During the height of the COVID-19 lockdown, they had a hard time getting together to rehearse, but eventually held an outdoor rehearsal at a farm which they recorded for their fans.

As venues have begun opening back up, they've played outdoors in spaces across Apalachicola as well as the stage at Hurricane's Grill & Wings.

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"Playing onstage, I get to really enjoy what's going on and let the music come through me a bit," says McMillan. "As a band, we've always enjoyed playing music together and we've always had something we've wanted to share. You're going on a journey that takes all kinds of twists and turns along the way."

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).